

COA/Commission Communication Plan

Professional Services Division

April 2007

Overview of this Report

Among the recommendations to revise the accreditation system that was made by the COA and the Work Group was to improve communication between the Commission and the Committee on Accreditation. This agenda item provides an update on the Commission's discussion on this topic at their March 2007 meeting, and presents an implementation plan for COA consideration and action.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Committee adopt the COA/Commission Communication Plan as described on page 4 of this agenda item.

Background

At the July and September 2006 Commission meetings, the Commission adopted the set of recommendations to revise the accreditation system as presented by the Committee on Accreditation and developed in conjunction with the Accreditation Study Work Group. Among the recommendations was included a recommendation to improve communication between the Committee and the Commission. The intent of that recommendation is to ensure sufficient two way communication between the two bodies.

A number of ideas were discussed briefly by the Commission at past commission meetings, but no specific plan was adopted. Instead, the Commission directed staff to work with the COA to draft a plan as to how that improved communication could take place. To that end, the COA discussed this issue at the February 2007 COA meeting and put forth suggestions for the major components of a communication plan. These suggestions were presented to the Commission at their March 2007 meeting.

Summary of Commission Discussion

Staff presented these options for improving communication recommended by the COA at the March 8, 2007 meeting of the Commission and the Commission discussed each option. A brief description of the Commission conversation and direction on each of these options is included below.

- 1) *Maintain the Annual Report to the Commission.* The Education Code requires that the Committee on Accreditation report to the Commission annually. In addition, this annual report provides members of the public and policymakers with a single reference document on the accreditation activities that have taken place in a particular year.

The Commission agreed that there is a need to maintain the annual report to the Commission.

- 2) *Alter the Annual Report to the Commission to reflect the revised system.* The accreditation cycle has changed significantly with the adoption of the revised accreditation cycle. The new annual report to the Commission could include summary information about biennial reports, program assessment, and the results of site visits. In addition, in the first few years of operation, staff and the Committee on Accreditation could include information about the successes and challenges of implementing the revised system, evaluation information collected from the field on the new system, and information on adjustments that are made to refine the process. As the system continues to full implementation in the coming years, evaluation information might be a standard part of the annual report to provide the Commission with critical information on the implementation of the system.

The Commission agreed with the suggestions for enhancing the annual report to better reflect the new revised system and its various components. The Commission also endorsed the concept of including issues related to the implementation of the revised system, such as the inclusion of challenges and successes and areas in need of refinement. Some Commissioners noted their interest in ensuring that the selection and training of members of the BIR was included in the reports and updates.

- 3) *COA Co-Chairs or their designee from the Committee make additional presentations to the Commission regarding Committee activities.* The Committee had discussed this option on several occasions and there was general agreement with the concept. What remained unclear is the Commission's expectation or desire for the frequency of such reports. The Committee members suggested that a report at every Commission meeting would be unnecessary but, rather, the frequency of reports should be guided by the information that needed to be presented. Direction from the Commission on this topic was sought.

Also noted was that the transition from the old system to the revised system and the necessity of phasing in various components over time requires that the Commission be provided with updates more frequently. An example was given that the pilot biennial reporting this spring and the first year of transition in 2007-08, these reports may come to the Commission quite frequently for the next year or two.

In their March 2007 meeting, the members of the Commission generally agreed with this option. However, several important comments were made. First, the Commission noted the amount of time that individuals serving on the Committee on Accreditation generously provide to the Commission for accreditation purposes. The members of the Commission were hesitant to add additional time burdens to the Co-Chair's schedules, recognizing that they were already contributing significant time to the accreditation process. As a result, they endorsed this option with the notion that these additional reports would be given on an "as needed" basis. They charged staff with the task of working with the Co-Chairs to determine when these additional presentations would occur and to ensure their inclusion on the Commission agenda at appropriate times.

- 4) *The Commission Chair appoints a liaison from the Commission to the Committee on Accreditation.* The liaison would receive all agenda materials, be invited to each meeting, could participate in all discussion, but would not have a vote on accreditation decisions. The liaison would have the responsibility to report to the Commission at each meeting on the activities of the Committee. The Co-Chairs could be primarily responsible for reporting to the Commission, and the liaison offering additional comment and observations.

In the past year, this option had broad support on the Commission. However, that support was not as clear at this most recent meeting. Some members expressed a desire to have a direct contact with the COA through a liaison, while others seemed to indicate that was unnecessary with improved communication. In addition, some Commissioners felt that a specific liaison should be identified, if one is utilized, and that the same Commissioner should attend all the meetings. Other Commissioners suggested that the responsibility should rotate through the members of the Commission so that all Commissioners would know more about the accreditation system. The Commission reached no consensus on this item and asked staff to bring this idea back at a future commission meeting for additional discussion.

- 5) *Communication between the Chair of the Commission and the COA Co-Chairs should be expanded.* COA members noted that a goal in improving communication would be to try to establish a closer partnership with the Commission. COA suggested that it may be very helpful to have some direct interaction between the Chair of the Commission and the COA Co-Chairs. Such communication may foster greater understanding of the needs of the Commission and ensure that the COA better addresses issue of concern or interest.

The Commission noted that this particular option does not necessarily need to be formalized but that the communication should take place on an “as needed” basis.

Additional Commission Suggestion

The Commission made the following suggestion, which was not included in the list of options provided by COA.

- 6) *Include information about accreditation in the Director’s Reports and the Weekly Update.* One of the most important communication tools that has been implemented by the Executive Director since assuming office in August 2006 has been the *Weekly Update*. Each Friday, a summary of Commission activities for the past week and a preview of upcoming events are provided to every member of the Commission. Feedback from Commissioners suggests that this communication tool has been highly effective in ensuring that Commissioners keep abreast of activities of the Commission and its staff. As a result, the members of the Commission suggested that accreditation activities could be communicated to Commissioners using the Weekly Update. In

addition, they suggested utilizing the Director's Report during the Commission meetings as well.

Communication Plan for 2007-08

Given the above direction from the Commission, staff suggests adoption of the following for 2007-08:

Communication Activity	When
Commission Agenda Item Re: Liaison to COA	June 2007
Staff Update to the Commission on Implementation of Revised Accreditation System	June, August 2007, and as needed beyond these meetings.
Co-Chairs Present on Upcoming Accreditation Visits for 2007-08 along with update on implementation of revised system	October 2007, and then as needed.
Executive Director's <i>Weekly Updates</i> include Accreditation Information	1 week prior to each accreditation visit, and 1 week after each visit, with accreditation recommendation noted. Before each COA meeting, noting each institution under consideration for accreditation findings.
Staff work with COA on Revised Annual Report Format	Winter/Spring 2008
Revised Annual Accreditation Report is Presented to Commission	August 2008

Use of Website

In addition to the communication between COA and the Commission, the Commission's website will continue to be an important tool to ensuring better communication with policy makers, institutions, and members of the public. For the coming year, the Commission staff will be responsible for keeping the Commission's website up to date. The website will include, but not be limited to, the following items:

- 1) COA Schedule of Meetings
- 2) COA Agenda and Meeting Minutes
- 3) Accreditation Reports for Each Institution
- 4) COA Annual Reports
- 5) Information for Institutions including deadline dates, cohort information, report templates
- 6) Information for reviewers, including training dates, interest forms, application forms,
- 7) When available, the revised *Accreditation Framework*
- 8) When available, the revised *Accreditation Handbook*